

The Prohibition of Nationalism in Islam

By Shabir Ahmed and Abid Karim

Nationalism is a concept alien to Islam because nationalism calls for unity based on family and tribalistic ties, whereas Islam binds people together on the `Aqeedah, that is belief in Allah (swt) and His Messenger (saaw). Islam calls for the ideological bond.

Grouping the Muslims on tribalistic lines is clearly forbidden. It is narrated by Abu Da'wud that the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said,

"He is not one of us who calls for `Asabiyyah, (nationalism/tribalism) or who fights for `Asabiyyah or who dies for `Asabiyyah."

And in another Hadith, the Messenger of Allah (saaw) referring to nationalism, racism, and patriotism said:

"Leave it, it is rotten." [Muslim and Bukhari] and in the Hadith recorded in Mishkat al-Masabith, the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said,

"He who calls for `Asabiyyah is as if he bit his father's genitals."

Also, the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said, narrated by At-Tirmidhi and Abu Dawud,

"There are indeed people who boast of their dead ancestors; but in the sight of Allah they are more contemptible than the black beetle that rolls a piece of dung with its nose. Behold, Allah has removed from you the arrogance of the Time of Jahiliyyah (Ignorance) with its boast of ancestral glories. Man is but an Allah-fearing believer or an unfortunate sinner. All people are the children of Adam, and Adam was created out of dust."

Also, the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said,

"Undoubtedly Allah has removed from you the pride of arrogance of the age of Jahiliyyah (ignorance) and the glorification of ancestors. Now people are of two kinds. Either believers who are aware or transgressors who do wrong. You are all the children of Adam and Adam was made of clay. People should give up their pride in nations because that is a coal from the coals of Hell-fire. If

they do not give this up Allah (swt) will consider them lower than the lowly worm which pushes itself through Khara (dung)." [Abu Dawud and Tirmidhi]

There are many examples in the Seerah where the Messenger of Allah (saaw) had rebuked those who upheld nationalism. One occasion a party of Jews conspired to bring about disunity in the ranks of the Muslims after seeing the Aus and Khazraj within Islam. A youth from amongst them was sent to incite remembrance of the battle of Bu'ath where the Aus had been victorious over the Khazraj, and he recited poetry to bring about division between them. As a result there was a call to arms.

When the news reached the Messenger of Allah (saaw), he (saaw) said,

"O Muslims, remember Allah, remember Allah. Will you act as pagans while I am present with you after Allah has guided you to Islam, and honored you thereby and made a clean break with paganism; delivered you thereby from disbelief; and made you friends thereby?"

When they heard this they wept, and embraced each other. This incident clearly highlights how the Messenger of Allah (saaw) rebuked any forms of tribalism. Allah (swt) then revealed,

"O you who believe! Fear Allah as He should be feared and die not except in a state of Islam with complete submission to Allah. And hold fast, all of you together, to the rope of Allah (i.e. Qur'an), and be not divided among yourselves; and remember with gratitude Allah's favors on you; for you were enemies and He joined your hearts in love, so that by His Grace you became brothers; and you were on the brink of the pit of fire, and He saved you from it. Thus Allah make His signs clear to you that you may be guided." [Surah Al'Imran (3); ayah 102-103]

It is narrated by Qatada that Ibnu Abi Hathim said that in the verses quoted above Allah (swt) has ordered the Muslims to hold fast to the book of Allah, His Deen, and to his covenant, and He has forbidden the Muslims to divide amongst themselves and to dispute with each other.

In another incident, Jabir ibn `Abd Allah al Ansari, narrated what happened at the watering place of al Muraysi which led to the Munafiqun stirring up the traces of `Asabiyyah and seeking to destroy the unity of the Muslims. He said:

"We were on a raid when one of the Muhajirun kicked one of the Ansar. The Ansar said, 'O Ansar! Help me! (calling his tribe) and the Muhajir said, 'O

Muhajirun! Help me! (calling his tribe). The Messenger of Allah (saaw) heard them and said, "Why are you stirring up something which belongs to Jahiliyah?"

The Messenger of Allah (saaw) did not deal with the situation only by speaking to his men, but he walked with the men all that day until nightfall, and through the night until morning and during the following day until the sun distressed them. Then he halted them, and as soon as they touched the ground, they fell asleep. He did this to distract their minds from what had transpired.

It is transmitted by at-Tabarani and al-Hakim that in one incident some people spoke very lowly about Salman al-Farsi. They spoke of the inferiority of the Persian in relation to the Arabs, and upon hearing this the Messenger of Allah (saaw) declared,

"Salman is from us, the ahl al-bayt (the Prophet's family)."

This statement of the Messenger of Allah (saaw) disassociates all links based on lineage and tribal considerations.

It was also transmitted, in two different versions, by Ibn al-Mubarak in his two books, Al-Birr and As-Salah, that some disagreement occurred between Abu Dharr and Bilal and Abu Dharr said to Bilal, "You son of a black woman." The Messenger of Allah (saaw) was extremely upset by Abu Dharr's comment, so he (saaw) rebuked him by saying,

"That is too much, Abu Dharr. He who has a white mother has no advantage which makes him better than the son of a black mother."

This rebuke had a profound effect on Abu Dharr, who then put his head on the ground swearing that he would not raise it until Bilal had put his foot over it.

These incidents demonstrate that tribal ties have no place in Islam. Muslims are commanded to stick together and not to disassociate themselves from each other just because they come from different tribes. The Messenger of Allah (saaw) also said,

"The believers, in their love, mutual kindness, and close ties, are like one body; when any part complains, the whole body responds to it with wakefulness and fever." [Muslim],

"The faithful are like one man: if his eyes suffers, his whole body suffers." [Muslim],

"An Arab is no better than a non-Arab. In return, a non-Arab is no better than an Arab. A red raced man was not better than a black one except in piety. Mankind are all Adam's children and Adam was created out of clay." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of Abu Musa]

Meaning that the Muslims, whether they are of Chinese, African, European or Asian origin, are one Ummah and they cannot be separated from each other. No tribalistic ties should ever break their unity.

Furthermore, Allah (swt), says,

"**The Faithful are but brothers...**" [Surah Al-Hujurat (49): ayah 10]

And the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said,

"The Faithful are to one another like [parts of] a building - each part strengthening the others."

and

"Every Muslim is a brother to a Muslim, neither wronging him nor allowing him to be wronged. And if anyone helps his brother in need, Allah will help him in his own need; and if anyone removes a calamity from [another] Muslim, Allah will remove from him some of the calamities of the Day of Resurrection; and if anyone shields [another] Muslim from disgrace, Allah will shield him from the disgrace on the Day of Resurrection." [Al-Bukhari and Muslim, on the authority of `Abd Allah ibn `Umar]

Some people claim that the Messenger of Allah (saaw) approved of nationalism because during the migration to Madinah, he (saaw) said about Makkah with tears in his (saaw) eyes,

"**You are the most beloved land of Allah to me.**"

However, this saying has nothing to do with nationalism, and this can be seen from the full saying which people often do not quote,

"**You are the most beloved land of Allah to me because you are the most beloved land of Allah to Allah.**"

The Messenger of Allah's (saaw) love for Makkah was based on the noble status that Allah (swt) has given to Makkah, and not because he (saaw) was born there. All Muslims should have this love and affection for Makkah because it is the most beloved land in the sight of Allah (swt). After all, the Muslims pray towards Makkah and go there to perform Hajj there as it houses the Ka'ba. The above saying of the Messenger of Allah (saaw) therefore has nothing to do with nationalism. If Rasoolillah (saaw) and the Muhajireen amongst the Sahabah (raa) were tied to the homeland (of Makkah), they would have settled in Makkah after it became part of the Islamic State.

Not only does Islam forbid people from grouping on nationalistic ties, but it also prohibits the establishment of more than one state, whether these states are based on nationalism or otherwise. The only state that is allowed for the Muslims is the Islamic State, which is a state that is governed exclusively by Islam. Allah (swt) addressed the Messenger (saaw),

"And rule between them by that which Allah revealed to you, and do not follow their vain desires away from the truth which came to you." [Surah Al-Madinah (5): ayah 48]

and,

"And rule between them by that which Allah revealed to you and do not follow their whims, and beware (be on the alert) that they may deviate you away from even some part of what Allah revealed to you." [Surah Al-Maidah (5): ayah 49]

The speech of Allah (swt) to the Messenger (saaw) is a speech to his (saaw) Ummah unless specific evidence comes to restrict this. In this case, there is no such restriction, and so it becomes obligatory for the Muslims to rule according to Islam. And ruling according to Islam leaves no room for nationalistic constitutions whatsoever because what is applied, and what forms the criteria for judgement, is the Book of Allah (swt) and the Sunnah of the Messenger (saaw).

Ruling according to Islam can only be achieved in one state, with one Khalifah. It is reported in Muslim that `Abdullah ibn `Amr ibn al-'As narrated that he heard the Messenger of Allah (saaw) say,

"He who gave the bay'ah to an Imam, giving him the clasp of his hand and the fruit of his heart has to obey him as long as he can. If another comes to dispute with him (his authority) strike the neck of that person."

Abu Said al-Khudri narrated that the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said,

"If a bay'ah is taken for two Khalifahs, kill the latter one."

And `Arfaja said that he heard the Messenger of Allah (saaw) say,

"If someone comes to you when you are united over one man and wants to break your strength and divide your unity, kill him."

This unity of the Muslims was clearly highlighted in the document that the Messenger of Allah (saaw) wrote when he established the Islamic State in Madinah. In this document, which was to regulate the relationships of Muslims and non-Muslims in the Islamic State, the Messenger of Allah (saaw) said regarding the Muslims,

"Allah's covenant amongst them is one" and, "The Believers are brothers to the exclusion of others" and, "The peace of the believers is indivisible. No separate peace shall be made with believers are fighting in the way of Allah."

These statements serve to indicate that Muslims are one body and they are not to be treated separately. Furthermore, the obligation of having one state, and not many nationalistic states, also comes from the Ijma' of the Sahabah. When the Messenger of Allah (saaw) died, the Sahabah (raa) convened to discuss the appointment of the Khalifah in the courtyard of Bani Sa'ida. One person had proposed that the Ansar should elect their own Amir and the Muhajireen their own, but Abu Bakr (ra) narrated the Hadith that forbids the Ummah from having more than one leader. Thus, the Sahabah (raa) never allowed more than one ruler and their consensus is a legitimate evidence for us.

Islam therefore leaves no room for the Saudi state, and Egyptian state, a Malaysian state, an Iranian state, or a Pakistani state. Islam calls for one state with one ruler where all Muslims are bound by the 'Aqeedah of Islam. And this is a matter decided by Islam to which we must submit to, for Allah (swt) says,

"O mankind, verily We have created you from a male and a female, and made you peoples and tribes, so that you may recognize each other. Verily, the most honored of you to Allah is (he who) safeguards himself against evil with full awareness of Divine Laws. Verily, Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware." [Surah Al Hujurat (49): ayah 13]

This verse was revealed immediately after the triumphant entry of the Prophet (saaw) into Makkah. After the declaration of immunity to the Quraysh, the Prophet (saaw) requested Bilal (ra) to give the Adhan. A group of three new Muslims were observing the proceedings when Bilal (ra) was asked to make the Adhan. One of them remarked how happy he was that his parents were not present to see such a disgusting sight. Another one, Harith bin Hisham commented that the Prophet (saaw) couldn't find anybody other than a black crow to make the Adhan. The third one, Abu Sufyan, abstained from making any adverse comment, stating that if he said anything, Allah (swt) would send a revelation to Muhammad (saaw) addressing his statement.

Allah (swt) sent Jibreel (as) to inform the Prophet (saaw) of the discussion that had just taken place. The prophet (saaw) asked the three men about their conversation, who confirmed to the Prophet (saaw) what Jibreel (as) told him. The verse of the Qur'an was subsequently revealed.

Because these individuals from the Quraysh were differentiating between themselves and Bilal (ra), Allah (swt) revealed this verse, concluding that the only criteria that Allah (swt) uses to judge between Muslims is that of Taqwa, which Bilal (ra) had and of which they were devoid of. This verse destroys the basis of nationalism in Islam.

In the first part of the Ayah, Allah (swt) revealed to humanity that all human beings were created from a single pair - Adam and Eve. This statement clearly refutes any claim of certain people that humans came from animals through the process of evolution or any other such claim.

The part of the Ayah, "**..and made you peoples and tribes, so that you may know each other...**" is usually misinterpreted as 'nations and tribes' to justify the differences created by the existing borders, specifically in the Muslim World. In addition, such misinterpretations are also used to encourage Muslims to foster pride in these affiliations.

Unfortunately, these Muslims quickly jump to conclusions without looking at what Allah (swt) says. The errant understanding of this Ayah attempts to legitimize the current situation of the Muslim Ummah and its existence in the form of many nations - divided and powerless - a miserable status quo resulting from the destruction of the Khilafah on March 3rd, 1924 by the puppet of the Kuffar, Mustafa Kamal.

Furthermore, such a misunderstanding lends legitimacy to the continued division of the already divided Muslim lands that occurred throughout the

twentieth century, with the division of the Indian Subcontinent into Indian, Pakistani and Kashmiri regions; the further division of Pakistan into two countries with the creation of Bangladesh; and the renting asunder of the last Islamic Khilafah by the British agent Sykes and the French agent Picot during World War I in which they used the pencil and ruler to divide the Muslim Ummah.

"It is not for a believer (male or female) that when Allah and His Messenger have decreed a matter that they should have any choice in their decision. And whoever disobeys Allah and His Messenger, he has indeed strayed in plain error." [Surah Al-Ahzab (33): ayah 36]

And those who still uphold nationalism, remember what Allah (swt) says,

"And let those who oppose the Messenger's commandment beware, lest some Fitnah (disbelief, trials, afflictions,...) befall them or a painful torment be inflicted on them." [Surah An-Nur (24): ayah 63]

A Chapter from The Roots of Nationalism in the Muslim World by Shabir Ahmed and Abid Karim